

Draft: NCF
2 Oct 73

Dear George:

25X1 Responding to your letter of September 25th, I am approaching COINS with two steps initially in mind. My most immediate desire is to satisfy myself that I have developed a sound basis for making the complex judgments that lie ahead. To do this, I am now selecting one experienced individual from CIA, and [] is supplying another. These two, and perhaps one more, will be charged with making a prompt assessment for me of the art of the possible relative to a larger scale community system, the capabilities it might have, and the costs it might incur. I don't intend to re-do the Malkin study, but I feel the need of a fairly rapid current assessment that will put things in my frame of reference.

25X1 Pending the results of this survey -- when I feel that I will have captured the essence of the problem -- I am open-minded as to the future architecture and overall concept for COINS. I believe certain upgrading is immediately possible, and [] and I are moving purposefully to make initial accomplishments that will realize benefits for the system and its users in the short run. Given the severe resources squeeze that faces us, I am not yet clear as to how much further it is cost effective to go in building a sophisticated on-line system. I want IRAC to keep this under constant monitoring in a cost-benefit sense, thus treating COINS like other complex intelligence undertakings that are competing for our limited resources. The need for COINS, as a communication network, to interface with IDHS and WMCCS in the Defense Department, raises technical problems where the intelligence community does not have full freedom to dictate solutions.

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The area where I think we can make immediate progress lies with improvement of the files now on COINS or that can be placed on the system in the relatively near future. Here, I have taken a number of specific initiatives, along the following lines:

-- File content and coverage. I am now taking steps to involve the substantive USIB committees in working with the Intelligence Information Handling Committee (IHC) to validate community need for particular kinds of data and to provide guidance on the content, coverage and format of files. For example, if COINS were to include a new file on the subject of nuclear energy, JAEIC should be involved in providing authoritative insights on behalf of potential users. The Product Review Group (PRG) of the Intelligence Community Staff also has a responsibility along these lines.

-- File completeness. A survey is now underway by PRG and IHC to illustrate and characterize the security and dissemination restrictions that must be dealt with to make data in COINS files more complete and accessible throughout the community. Based on the results of this survey, which I expect to have in hand within two weeks, we will begin a purposeful and orderly examination of this problem using the USIB structure.

-- File user assistance. I am asking that the interagency Data Base Working Group make, as a regular part of its survey of files for COINS, an examination of the adequacy of cross-reference notations and user instructions contained in the files. Where worthwhile improvements can be made, we will modify the programs that produce data for users.

-- File reliability. Upon completion of the assessment that I mentioned at the outset, I expect to share the results of that survey with USIB members. At that time I will be calling on them to accept specific responsibilities for producing and maintaining certain COINS files and for assuring their accuracy and completeness.

-- Analytical content. PRC and IHC are now testing for crisis and warning situations the rapid exchange of current intelligence among national operations and intelligence watch officers in a network running among the Washington area command centers (NOWTON). The subject matter may prove a worthwhile addition to COINS files. I am particularly interested in this project because it may take us one more step in expanding the on-line use of formatted intelligence materials for a somewhat more sophisticated user than the average COINS user at present.

Other steps I have taken include the designation of a new Acting Chairman for the IHC, replacing General Taylor who retired last March. I have instructed the new incumbent to take energetic action to carry out DCID responsibilities that bear on the steady, orderly upgrading of COINS. In another direction, you will find that the Objectives for the Intelligence Community, which I forwarded to the President on September 6th, include actions that may result in the development of a number of new data files and arrays. If any of these appear appropriate for COINS, I expect that we will be able to recognize this at the outset of our planning.

Sincerely,

WEC